United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

+ United Nations protests mistreatment of peace-keepers by Bosnian Serbs; stresses importance of resuming peace talks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

+ Secretary-General arrives in Spain for three-day visit; reiterates readiness to seek NATO air support for peace-keepers in danger in former Yugoslavia.

+ Member States pledge some 28,000 troops and specialists to new United Nations standby arrangements for peace-keeping; total expected to soon reach 70,000 as further commitments finalized.

+ General Assembly authorizes Secretary-General to commit nearly $90 million to finance UNPROFOR, MINURSO and International Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.

+ Two United States helicopters shot down in northern Iraq, with 25 casualties; United Nations says its personnel were not involved in incident.

+ FAO says global fishing sector will suffer disaster if industrial fleets are not controlled; calls for sustainable catch targets.

+ Committee against Torture to review reports by Switzerland, Nepal, Greece and Israel at twelfth session in Geneva from 18 to 29 April.

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A United Nations spokesman today expressed serious concern about Bosnian Serb mistreatment of peace-keepers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, saying a pattern of "totally unacceptable conduct" had emerged. Fifteen Canadian peace-keepers manning an observation post near Aliza were detained by Bosnian Serbs today, and were being held incommunicado, he said. Special Representative Yasushi Asashi intended to protest the incident to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

(more)

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Meanwhile, Bosnian Serbs in a tank had approached French peace-keepers in Krizoglavci and demanded their weapons, threatening to take them by force, the spokesman continued. The French had refused to hand over the weapons, resulting in a stand-off that was continuing. Noting that the Bosnian Serb tank was violating the Sarajevo exclusion zone, the spokesman warned that "measures" might be taken to resolve the situation.

The Bosnian Serbs had made a very bad error if they thought the United Nations was at war with, or hostile to, them, the spokesman went on to say. He stressed that the Organization's main goal in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the resumption of peace negotiations.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today began a three-day official visit to Spain by meeting with the country's Foreign Minister. He later attended a private luncheon offered by the King and Queen of Spain. Before travelling to that country from Bonn, the Secretary-General met with Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development.

In remarks to correspondents this morning, the Secretary-General expressed hope that the deteriorating situations in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda could be contained. He stressed that the United Nations had a responsibility to protect its peace-keepers, and that he would not hesitate to ask the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for air support when they were in danger in the former Yugoslavia. The Organization did not take positions in favour of, or against, any parties, he added.

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To date, Member States have pledged more than 28,000 troops and specialists towards the new United Nations standby arrangements for peace-keeping, according to Colonel Gérard Gambiez of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations. Colonel Gambiez was appointed by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali last year to head the team which has negotiated the agreements for the standby arrangements. He told correspondents at Headquaters today that the number of personnel available would soon grow to 70,000 as Member States finalized their commitments.

The Secretary-General had identified a need for the system of standby arrangements to meet increasing peace-keeping demands, Colonel Gambiez noted. The arrangements would facilitate the planning, implementation and effectiveness of peace-keeping operations. The personnel and resources provided would remain on standby in their home countries, and would be ready for deployment at short notice. Member States could contribute military units, specialized personnel, materials and equipment, as well as such services as hospitals, communications systems and strategic airlifts, he said.

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The General Assembly today authorized the Secretary-General to commit some $90 million to finance two United Nations missions and the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It took those actions by adopting, without a vote, drafts recommended by the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary).

The Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to commit almost $16 million gross a month to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), from 1 April to 31 July. That amount will cover the costs of the extra 3,660 military personnel provided for in Security Council resolution 908 (1994). The Assembly authorized him to commit $3.7 million for the United Nations Observer Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) from 1 April to 10 May, and another $3.7 million monthly from then until the end of July, with the agreement of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ).

The Secretary-General was also authorized to appropriate $11 million for the International Tribunal for 1994. That amount includes $5.6 million authorized by the Assembly last December.

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Two helicopters were shot down in northern Iraq today, resulting in around 25 fatalities, according to a United Nations spokesman. Contrary to some reports, neither the helicopters nor the personnel on board belonged to the United Nations, although the circumstances of the incident were unclear, he said.

It appeared that the helicopters belonged to the United States, and that they were carrying officials from the Military Coordination Centre (MCC) to a meeting with a United Nations official in the area, the spokesman went on to say. The MCC is part of "Operation Provide Comfort," which was established by France, the United Kingdom and the United States to aid Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq.

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If industrial fishing fleets are not controlled, the entire marine fishing sector will suffer disastrous social and economic consequences, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned. In two reports issued yesterday, the FAO said coastal communities in developing countries would face food shortages without regulations to tackle overfishing. Large subsidized fleets from industrialized nations had already over-exploited most of the world's major fisheries and seriously depleted valuable species.

Although fleets trawling waters far from home operated under fishing agreements, they created a serious threat to the resources and economies of traditional fishing societies, the FAO said. It urged a precautionary approach to fisheries management, including a reduction in fleet sizes and catch targets, as well as the adoption of thresholds that were more likely to sustain fish stocks.

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The Committee against Torture will hold its twelfth session in Geneva from 18 to 29 April, during which it will review the measures taken by Switzerland, Nepal, Greece and Israel to prevent and punish acts of torture. The four States will present reports on how they apply the rights and guarantees enshrined in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Committee will also examine information indicating that torture is being systematically practised in a State party to the Convention, as well as claims by individuals that they have been victims of torture.

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